

# Montgomery County: 40 Environmental Accomplishments Since the First Earth Day in 1970



## Then: In 1970:

- The book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962 by Silver Spring resident Rachel Carson, helped launch the environmental movement by heightening people's awareness of the environmental damage to wildlife and other living things resulting from human activities.
- Rivers were so polluted that in 1969, the Cuyahoga River caught fire and created a national scandal and a challenge to clean up polluted urban rivers.
- Factories were discharging untreated waste into rivers and into the air, and dumping waste without any containment requirements.
- Ground water contamination was widespread.
- Modern environmental laws like the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Superfund, and the Endangered Species Act did not exist.
- The cost of environmental pollution was not considered by corporations.
- The environment was not considered during the process of urban growth and planning.
- Neither the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency nor the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection existed.
- Those concerned about environmental issues were seen as a small, fringe group who did not represent the mainstream.

## Now: Montgomery County:

- 1) ***Created the Department of Environmental Protection*** to protect and enhance the quality of life in the community through the conservation, preservation, and restoration of the environment, guided by the principles of science, resource management, sustainability and stewardship.
- 2) ***Adopted Environmental Codes*** on: air quality control, energy management and policy, erosion and sediment control, stormwater management, forest conservation and trees, noise control, pesticides, pond safety, quarries, sewage, sewage disposal and drainage, and solid waste.
- 3) ***Enforces laws*** to address illegal dumping and air quality, noise and water pollution violations.

# Water/Wastewater

**Then:** In 1970, oil spills, polluting factories and power plants, raw sewage in waterways and loss of wetlands were commonplace.

## **Now:** Montgomery County:

- 4) Was one of the first local jurisdictions to *establish and implement innovative strategies* to protect and improve the County's water and groundwater.
- 5) Is one of a handful of local governments in the nation to *monitor water quality using biological indicators*, in addition to water chemistry, to assess stream health and guide watershed restoration efforts.
- 6) *Completed scores of projects to restore and improve water quality through a comprehensive watershed approach* that combines restoration of stream banks and in-stream features with stormwater pond retrofits. This approach provides both ecosystem benefits and stormwater pollution control.
- 7) Protects the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay by treating wastewater at advanced state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plants. Eighty percent is treated at the *Blue Plains Wastewater Treatment Plant*, the largest, advanced wastewater treatment plant in the world. A significant portion of the remaining wastewater is treated at the *Seneca Wastewater Treatment Plant*, which also helps protect Seneca Creek.
- 8) Was the *first in Maryland to create a stormwater utility* (through the Water Quality Protection Charge) to maintain and retrofit stormwater structures and protect water quality.
- 9) Has been a leader in Maryland to promote stormwater management designs that use *on-site filtering of rainfall runoff to reduce stormwater pollution*. To mimic natural processes and enhance ecosystems, environmental-site design uses vegetation to filter and absorb rainfall runoff into the ground, which reduces stormwater pollution on residential, institutional and commercial properties.
- 10) Is a national leader in offering technical assistance and rebates to encourage environmental-site design installations on private property. Residential, commercial and institutional land owners are encouraged to control stormwater pollution through the County's *RainScapes Program*.
- 11) *Designated Special Protection Areas* in County law to preserve areas with high-quality or unusually sensitive water resources or other environmental features.
- 12) Was a key advocate for a regional *water conservation* compact that has greatly improved the Washington area's ability to deal with droughts and balance human needs with the ecological needs of the Potomac River.

# Air Quality/Climate Protection

**Then:** In 1970, polluting factories and power plants, leaded gasoline and acid rain were commonplace.

## Now: Montgomery County:

- 13) Led the effort to establish a regional partnership to implement comprehensive, innovative strategies to *protect and improve air quality*.
- 14) Was one of the first jurisdictions in the country to set a goal of reducing 80 percent of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The *Montgomery County Climate Action Plan* outlines strategies to achieve this goal.
- 15) Established the first *Code Red/Ride Free* policy in the Washington region, offering free bus trips during the worst ozone days to reduce vehicle emissions.
- 16) Purchased nearly *300 alternative fuel buses, vans and trucks* to reduce air pollution and reduce consumption of imported fuels. Nearly one-half of the County's bus fleet is hybrid diesel/electric or runs on compressed natural gas.
- 17) *Strengthened local air quality laws* and developed the resources necessary to address indoor air quality and health concerns.
- 18) Negotiated collection contracts with private waste haulers to use *trash and recycling trucks powered by compressed natural gas* (CNG) to reduce harmful air emissions, with more CNG trucks being phased in.

## Energy

**Then:** In 1970, there was no focus on energy efficiency except related to oil shortages and political events in the Middle East.

## Now: Montgomery County:

- 19) *Purchases 30 percent of energy as clean, wind power*, one of the highest in the nation. Other County agencies will soon purchase 20 percent as clean energy.
- 20) Established *property tax credits* for energy-efficiency and renewable-energy projects.
- 21) Established *monetary rewards* for purchasing clean energy or renewable energy certificates, or generating on-site clean energy.
- 22) *Public Schools (MCPS) are now installing geothermal energy* for all new schools and modernizations, saving 30 percent over conventional energy systems. MCPS also has *solar arrays* at eight schools, and expects to replace up to seven megawatts of power with solar energy by 2017.
- 23) Public water and sewer utility, the *Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC)*, *is the largest local government direct purchaser of clean energy* in the United States (at the time of purchase). WSSC purchases one-third of its energy requirements from a wind farm, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 90 million pounds per year.
- 24) *Converted traffic signals* from incandescent to Light Emitting Diode (LED) lights, resulting in an energy savings of 220 percent.

# Land/Forest Preservation and Sustainability

**Then:** In 1970, the loss of wilderness, extinction of wildlife, loss of forest canopy and loss of historically or architecturally valuable resources were commonplace. There were no environmental impact statements or assessments of major projects and no regulatory or legal mechanisms to protect the environment and public health.

## Now: Montgomery County:

- 25) Even with Montgomery's population is reaching the one million mark and growing, has the country's most successful *farmland and open space preservation program* (known as the *Agricultural Reserve Program*), according to the Natural Resources Defense Council and the American Farmland Trust, with 93,000 acres preserved (including 71,500 acres of agricultural easements).
- 26) Preserved an additional 35,500 acres of land as local parks, protecting stream valleys and virtually eliminating flooding damage to homes. Environmental guidelines help protect streams and wetlands with forested buffers. *Agricultural preservation, federal/state/local parks, and various easements are protecting almost 50 percent of the County.*
- 27) *Established a forest conservation law* that has resulted in 10,000 acres of forest conservation easements and an active reforestation program. A *Forest Preservation Strategy* outlines ways to maintain and expand the County's forest canopy.
- 28) Is one of only a handful of jurisdictions nationwide to establish local legislation that requires new multi-family and non-residential construction to be *LEED certified (or equivalent)*.
- 29) *Local legislation requires County buildings to be LEED silver* (or equivalent), and all new *school* construction or modernizations also have that goal.
- 30) Developed a *Green Business Certification Program* in partnership with the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, to formally recognize businesses and others that have taken voluntary steps to protect, preserve and improve the environment.

# Solid/Hazardous Waste

**Then:** In 1970, oil spills, toxic dumps, pesticides and unlined landfills were commonplace and there was virtually no recycling or reuse.

## Now: Montgomery County:

- 31) *Closed the Gude and Oaks landfills*, which did not meet modern environmental standards.
- 32) Installed landfill gas-to-energy technology to *recover methane gas and generate energy at closed landfills*.
- 33) Began Countywide *residential recycling programs* that recycle more than 50 percent of residential waste generated.
- 34) Passed legislation that *requires commercial and multi-family properties to recycle*.
- 35) Opened a resource recovery facility to *convert waste to energy*. The Montgomery County Resource Recovery Facility is the first publicly-owned one to install air pollution control technology that cut nitrogen oxides emissions in half.
- 36) Operates a *Household Hazardous Waste* facility to keep harmful household products out of the waste stream and prevent environmental and/or human health impacts.
- 37) Began the *Ecwise Program* to provide safe hazardous waste disposal to small commercial generators.
- 38) Established the Dickerson Compost Facility as an essential component of County efforts to *recycle yard trim*.
- 39) Recycles nearly *70 percent* of land clearing and construction and demolition debris.
- 40) Provides *innovative reuse and recycling programs* through online exchanges and collections of bicycles, clothing and textiles, electronics, scrap metal, used vegetable oil and other materials.